

From Classroom Inquiry to Transformative Praxis: Reconceptualising Action Research in Language Teacher Education

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Abstract

In recent decades, Action Research (AR) has played an important role in language teacher education (LTE). However, most of the time, this role is limited to solving pedagogical problems and improving classroom practices, which may cause the neglect of the social, political, epistemological, and identity-related components of teacher research. Therefore, this conceptual paper suggests a reinterpretation of AR as a transformative praxis in the form of an integrated framework that redefines its role in language teacher education. The paper regards AR as a socially situated, critically reflective, identity-informed, and ethically engaged form of professional training. In doing so, it is grounded in sociocultural theory, critical pedagogy, and professional agency theory. These perspectives are brought together in the form of a Transformative Praxis Cycle that consists of five recursive phases: problem posing, dialogic inquiry, situated action, reflexive analysis, and professional repositioning. This model illustrates that teacher research is not only limited to the identification of pedagogical problems and improvement of classroom practices. It can rather actively contribute to identity development, professional agency, critical consciousness and knowledge production. Implications for LTE, such as curriculum design, mentorship and supervision, practitioner knowledge, the research-practice relationship, contextual responsiveness, equity, and professional authority are also investigated in this paper. The argument advanced, herein, is that teachers can become reflective practitioners, knowledge producers and active participants in educational transformation if AR is embedded as a permanent part of the teaching profession, rather than as an isolated course requirement. The proposed framework attempts to bridge gaps in ELT by linking professional training with questions of power, identity, and context. It also seeks to provide a theoretical basis for future empirical research by suggesting a more participatory; context-sensitive, and socially responsive conception of language teacher education.

Introduction

The last few decades have witnessed growing scholarly attention to the gap between theory and practice in the field of language teacher education (LTE). The complex realities that teachers face in their actual classrooms create tensions regarding the relevance and applicability of the knowledge acquired through initial teacher education courses pertaining to applied linguistics, second language acquisition, and pedagogy. This divide has given rise to increasing awareness that the epistemological and experiential gaps defining the discipline need to be bridged by developing teacher education models that foster reflective, critical, and context-responsive pedagogies.

A potential means to achieve such integration has often been offered through Action Research (AR) which is a strategy allowing teachers to methodically reflect upon their teaching practices in such a way as to promote their professional development and grow closely involved with pedagogical concerns. However, the theoretical underpinnings of action research are still insufficiently explored despite the fact that it is widely endorsed in pre-service and in-service LTE environments. An important body of research on AR in language education adopts a pragmatic and instrumentalist approach that describes AR as a tool employed to solve urgent classroom problems or improve teaching practices. Although such studies may provide a relevant analysis of useful improvements, they may neglect the more general social, political, and epistemological aspects of teacher research.

This paper contends that a stronger and more theoretically grounded understanding of action research is needed—one that transcends utilitarian conceptions and repositions it as a transformative praxis without dismissing the practical value of classroom inquiry. Drawing on ideas related to professional agency theory, critical pedagogy, and sociocultural theory, the paper proposes a new conceptual model of AR that places teacher research within a larger framework of identity development, ethical reflection, and social transformation. Within this reinterpretation of the concept of AR, much focus is placed on the teachers' role as active agents of change who can challenge and transform the learning environment in which they work, rather than simply be practitioners and researchers.

Therefore, the main argument supported in this paper is that language teachers can become agents of change, develop reflective capacity and social consciousness as professionals when action research is conceptualized as a transformative praxis. The paper examines how such a reconceptualization can consider teacher education as a dialectical process with historical setting, contextual embedment, and political consciousness. Within this perspective, a critical approach that integrates knowledge creation, ethical responsibility and emancipatory practices within LTE is proposed, so as to move beyond limited interpretations of AR.

1. Methodological Design: A Critical Integrative Conceptual Review

1.1 Research Design and Rationale

This article adopted a critical integrative conceptual review to explore how AR has been conceptualised in LTE and to construct a theoretically based overview of its potential to act as

transformative praxis. Since the purpose of the review was neither to evaluate the impact of a particular intervention nor to conduct a statistical meta-analysis, implementing an integrative rather than a traditional systematic review was deemed more appropriate. Integrative reviews are particularly suited to questions that require the synthesis of heterogeneous conceptual, theoretical, and empirical literature to generate new conceptual frameworks (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005).

The review has a threefold purpose: (a) to trace the evolving understanding of AR from technical problem-solving towards practical, critical and participatory research paradigms; (b) to identify theoretical models that explain how practitioner inquiry impacts teacher learning, identity and agency; and (c) to synthesise these models into a coherent conceptual framework for transformative AR in LTE. The review focused on conceptual relevance and theoretical explanatory potential rather than just combining numbers. This methodological choice fits the article's theoretical objective: rather than offering an empirical validation, it presents a theoretical model that requires subsequent empirical testing.

1.2 Sources of Literature

Sources for the literature review were driven through a multi-database search strategy drawing primarily on Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, ProQuest and EBSCOhost. The database search was supported by the examination of scholarly books, edited volumes and book chapters published by established academic presses including Routledge, Springer, SAGE, Oxford University Press, Teachers College Press and Cambridge University Press. This multi-source strategy was followed to guarantee comprehensive coverage of research on teacher identity, teacher education, practitioner inquiry, action research, sociocultural theory, critical pedagogy and teacher professional development, and was intended to reduce the limitations of dependence on a single bibliographic database. The reference base comprised 53 sources, including 22 peer-reviewed journal articles and 31 scholarly books or book chapters. Table 1 details database coverage across the corpus.

Table 1: Overall database coverage of reviewed literature

Database / source type	No. of references % of 53 references	
Scopus-indexed journals	21	39.6%
Web of Science Core Collection	21	39.6%
ERIC	21	39.6%
ProQuest databases	20	37.7%
EBSCO databases	20	37.7%

Database / source type	No. of references % of 53 references	
Peer-reviewed scholarly books/monographs	29	54.7%
Scholarly book chapters	2	3.8%
Journal articles overall	22	41.5%
Books and chapters overall	31	58.5%

Note. Individual journal articles are indexed across multiple databases simultaneously.

This combination of indexed peer-reviewed research and foundational scholarly works provided both contemporary research evidence and the theoretical and methodological background for the study.

1.3 Scope and Search Strategy

The literature corpus comprised four interconnected bodies of scholarship: (a) foundational and contemporary action research, (b) language teacher education and teacher learning, (c) teacher identity and professional agency, and (d) critical pedagogy and transformative praxis (Table 2). Database searches were executed using boolean combinations of key concepts, including: "action research" OR "practitioner inquiry" OR "critical action research", "language teacher education" OR "ELT" OR "TESOL", "transformative praxis" OR "critical pedagogy", "teacher identity" OR "teacher agency", and "linguistic equity" OR "multilingualism" OR "contextual responsiveness". Publication dates were left open to include both core theory and recent research. As a result, seminal works were retained to provide the theoretical base (e.g., Freire, 1970; Vygotsky, 1978; Lewin, 1946; Carr & Kemmis, 1986) while recent studies (e.g., Crookes, 2021; Banegas et al., 2022; Nazari et al., 2024) were integrated to reflect current developments in LTE.

Table 2: Categorization of Reviewed Literature (Sample Sources)

Literature Strand	Key Sources	Role & Theoretical Purpose in the Review
1. Foundational & Contemporary Action Research	Lewin (1946), Corey (1953), Stenhouse (1975), Carr & Kemmis (1986), Grundy (1987), Zeichner (1993), Wallace (1998), Burns (1999, 2010, 2023), Kemmis (2009), Kemmis et al. (2014)	Establishes historical, methodological, critical, and participatory foundations; distinguishes technical, practical, critical, and participatory orientations of action research.

Literature Strand	Key Sources	Role & Theoretical Purpose in the Review
2. Language Teacher Education & Teacher Learning	Donato & McCormick (1994), Borg (2010), Johnson (2009), Johnson & Golombek (2016), Edwards (2021)	Conceptualizes teacher development as socially mediated and situated; frame practitioner inquiry as a form of situated professional learning rather than a mere research procedure.
3. Teacher Identity, Professional Agency & Modern Empirical Application	Beauchamp & Thomas (2009), Akkerman & Meijer (2011), Eteläpelto et al. (2013), Priestley et al. (2015), Barkhuizen (2017), Nazari et al. (2024), Aqajani Delavar et al. (2025), Banegas et al. (2026)	Examines how action research transforms teachers' professional positioning; connects conceptual arguments on identity and agency to contemporary empirical research on social justice and action research.
4. Critical Pedagogy, Praxis & Socially Responsive Education	Freire (1970), Canagarajah (1999), Kumaravadivelu (2012), Crookes (2013, 2021), Paris & Alim (2017),	Explores the political and ethical dimensions of practitioner inquiry; grounds the analysis of problem-posing, power dynamics, linguistic legitimacy, social justice, and the praxis relationship between reflection and action.

1.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Sources were included if they met at least one of the following criteria: (a) provided seminal theoretical or methodological accounts of AR; (b) addressed practitioner inquiry within language education; (c) conceptualized teacher learning, identity, or agency; or (d) inspected critical pedagogy, social justice, or structural power dynamics in education. Sources were excluded when they simply used the term “action research” without further deep processing of its methodological or professional-development dimensions, when their settings were too different to apply to the present study or when they just consisted of descriptive reports with no clear addition to the theoretical questions guiding the review.

1.4 Analytical Procedure

Data analysis followed an adapted critical interpretive synthesis (CIS) drawing primarily on models developed by Dixon-Woods et al. (2006) and Barnett-Page & Thomas (2009). Unlike traditional narrative summaries, CIS critically inspects underlying assumptions across literature strands to derive new synthetic constructs. Thus, to proceed consistently, the analysis went through five iterative stages.

Stage 1: Conceptual Mapping. Sorting sources into core key thematic categories (AR methodology, teacher cognition, critical pedagogy, agency, and institutional conditions).

Stage 2: Comparative Reading. Analyzing sources across five analytical questions.

1. What is the principal object of inquiry?
2. Who has authority to define the problem?
3. What forms of knowledge or evidence are considered legitimate?
4. What type of change is the inquiry intended to produce?
5. How is the teacher positioned in relation to knowledge, power, and professional action?

Stage 3: Identification of Conceptual Tensions. Identifying core theoretical debates in LTE: individual reflection versus collective dialogic inquiry, technical efficiency versus emancipatory transformation, and teacher individual agency versus contextually constrained agency and (d) changing classroom teaching versus changing institutional and professional culture.

Stage 4: Theoretical Integration. Synthesizing Sociocultural Theory (clarifying mediated learning), Critical Pedagogy (explaining power and ethics), and Professional Agency Theory (explaining choice and action), using *teacher identity* as the binding theme.

Stage 5: Conceptual Synthesis and Framework Development. Finally, the relationships identified across the literature were synthesised into the proposed framework. The *Transformative Praxis Cycle* emerged directly from this interpretive synthesis. Rather than compiling existing steps, the five phases were constructed by mapping theoretical concepts onto inquiry stages:

- **Problem Posing** (Freirean critical consciousness with context analysis): Combines identifying real-world challenges with critical awareness of their underlying causes.
- **Dialogic Inquiry** (Vygotskian ZPD and Bakhtinian dialogue): Puts learning through shared dialogue and peer support into practice.
- **Situated Action:** Turns teacher agency into direct classroom practice.
- **Reflexive Analysis:** integrates critical self-examination with ethical accountability.
- **Professional Repositioning:** articulates the transformative shift in teacher identity; it defines how a teacher's identity changes and how that change prompts subsequent cycles of inquiry.

While the first four dimensions extend established action-research traditions, professional repositioning is introduced as the mechanism that connects inquiry to changes in teachers' professional identity and agency and consequently with subsequent cycles of inquiry.

1.6. Methodological Limitations

This review has some limitations. Because it is a conceptual review rather than a systematic one, this study does not claim exhaustive coverage of all empirical AR literature. Also, selecting sources according to theoretical relevance is a matter of the researchers' judgment which undoubtedly leaves room for some bias. In addition, gathering literature from different fields—like applied linguistics, education, sociology and critical theory—implies working with varying definitions, terms and underlying assumptions. However, these limitations are consistent with the conceptual nature of the paper, which aims to provide an interpretive framework for future empirical validation rather than a statistical generalization.

2. Review of Action Research Theoretical Views

2.1 Historical Foundations

The pioneering work of Kurt Lewin in the 1940s laid down the theoretical foundations of action research. Lewin regarded AR as an approach where research and practice are tightly related through a collaborative cyclical process of inquiry that involves planning, action, observation, and reflection. Instead of considering researchers as external experts, he stressed the importance of the active participation of all those involved in social problems and highlighted the relationship between knowledge production, practical action and social change (Lewin, 1946). This conception of the teacher-as-researcher and cyclical practitioner inquiry established a foundation on which subsequent research has built (Zeichner, 1993; Wallace, 1998; Tripp, 2005; Burns, 2010)

Later, instead of focusing only on finding solutions to classroom problems, developments in action research extended its emphasis on two important dimensions: *democratic participation*, wherein practitioners and stakeholders work together to identify problems, generate knowledge and make decisions about their practices, and *emancipatory transformation*, which consists of a critical examination and modification of the social conditions and power relations that give shape to those practices. These critical aspects of AR were highlighted by many scholars who viewed this approach as a participatory process that involves practitioners in collective tasks whose aim is to examine and transform the social contexts that influence their work (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Grundy, 1987; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005; Kemmis, 2009; Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014).

AR gained much importance in the educational context as a means of improving the quality of teaching practice and enhancing professional growth. For example, Corey (1953) advocated practitioner-led inquiry that enables teachers to analyse educational problems, and Stenhouse (1975) put forward the concept of teachers acting as researchers engaged in curriculum research. This perspective was, later, further developed by Lawrence Stenhouse's (1975) conception of the teacher as an active researcher involved in curriculum research. According to

Stenhouse, teachers should actively be engaged in analysing, interpreting and developing educational practices, instead of simply implementing curricula developed by external agents. He stated that “it is teachers who, in the end, will change the world of education, not researchers or policy-makers” (Stenhouse, 1975, p. 143). Such ideas were very significant in shaping the concept that teachers’ critical engagement with their own classrooms is the source of professional knowledge. These contributions established firm theoretical grounds for current understandings of teacher research and reflective practice, shifting teachers from the mere position of implementers of educational knowledge to that of active producers of professional knowledge.

2.2 Action Research for Language Teachers' Education (LTE)

According to Burns (2010), AR in ELT is defined as “the study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action within it” (p. 2). Accordingly, AR enables language teachers to be reflective practitioners who can make important pedagogical decisions related to the context in which they operate and contribute to developing professional knowledge. Thus, in addition to the increasing emphasis on reflective practice, teacher autonomy and practitioner enquiry, action research has acquired considerable significance in the field of language teacher education since the 1990s. It has changed the traditionally accepted view of teachers as mere users of theories produced by external agents and position them as active researchers of their own practice. In this respect, Wallace (1998) and Burns (2010) maintained that action research enables teachers to examine their own classrooms in a cyclic process of planning, action, and reflection, and therefore, advanced that pre-service and in-service programmes should integrate it.

Three main types of AR are most commonly cited, depending on its purpose and theoretical orientation. Grundy (1987) distinguished among technical, practical and emancipatory action research. Technical action research is concerned with finding solutions to specific classroom problems and improving teaching effectiveness. Practical action research focuses on teachers’ professional training, reflective thinking and understanding of their own practices. Emancipatory action research, on the other hand, emphasises broader issues related to power, inequality, social justice, and critical consciousness. In the same vein, Zeichner (1993) maintained that in the context of teacher education, AR should be regarded as a means of teacher development and social reconstruction, not merely as a method that improves individual classroom practices. According to him, while teacher inquiry encourages practitioners to critically interact with the educational and social contexts where they work, it has the potential to help them grow professionally.

Since language teaching is influenced by social, cultural, institutional, and political conditions, the emancipatory orientation is specifically relevant to language teacher education. Based on the works of Freire (1970) and Habermas (1972), this orientation regards AR as a form of praxis, where both critical reflection and purposeful action are combined. Therefore, Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon (2014) believe that teachers should be encouraged to question prevailing assumptions, investigate unequal power relations, and change the conditions that govern their teaching practice, rather than simply think of improving their classroom techniques.

Nevertheless, in language teacher education this transformational potential is not always realised. According to Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009), research is not always considered as a sustainable professional attitude but rather as a momentary course requirement. If AR is to become really transformative, it needs to be treated as a permanent act of critical reflection, enquiry and action in language teacher education.

Despite this immense relevance and potential, the use of AR in ELT has not been without criticism. One frequent criticism is that AR is often used to solve immediate classroom problems or improve teaching practices, neglecting broader institutional, social, and political problems (Tripp, 2005; Crookes, 2013). In addition, Zeichner (2009), stated that instead of considering AR as a sustained form of critical professional research, it is sometimes treated as an isolated assignment or capstone project. Because of this, whether it is implemented as a continuous, collaborative, and critically engaged process largely determines its transformative potential.

2.3 Current Limitations and Gaps

Many theoretical and pedagogical limitations characterise the field of action research in language teacher education despite the substantial body of literature that exists. The first of these limitations is that sociocultural, critical, and identity-based perspectives are often treated separately rather than integrated into a unified framework because many studies on AR are not grounded in a coherent theoretical foundation. This can reduce the extent to which it is possible to understand how interaction, institutional conditions, and teachers' professional development shape classroom practices. Edwards & Burns (2016) explained that research on language teacher action research has nevertheless shown that teachers who participate in research can considerably promote their professional identities and long-term development.

The second limitation concerns teacher identity and professional agency which are often insufficiently examined. Although teacher identity is understood as dynamic, socially situated, and continuously negotiated (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011), and professional agency concerns teachers' capacity to make choices and influence their working conditions (Eteläpelto et al., 2013), AR is most of the time concerned with changes in teaching techniques, neglecting how research affects the way teachers understand their professional roles or their ability to make decisions and cause change in their classrooms.

Moreover, instead of focusing on the research process itself, many studies mainly emphasize immediate and measurable outcomes. Some researchers, including Mezirow (1997) claimed that the gradual and recursive nature of professional learning, which takes place through an iterative process of reflection, action, evaluation, and revision, may be overshadowed when the main focus is placed on improved performance or classroom effectiveness. From the perspective of transformative learning, achievement of short-term improvements alone is not what leads to meaningful change, it rather needs to be accompanied with the critical questioning of existing assumptions.

Finally, some researchers such as Crookes (2021) find that AR is sometimes reduced to a technical classroom problem-solving activity when it ignores institutional policies, linguistic

inequalities, power relations and unequal access to resources which can significantly affect teaching practices. When this happens, AR loses its potential to promote critical thinking and broader educational transformation because it is detached from the larger sociopolitical context of education.

2.4 Towards a Reconceptualization

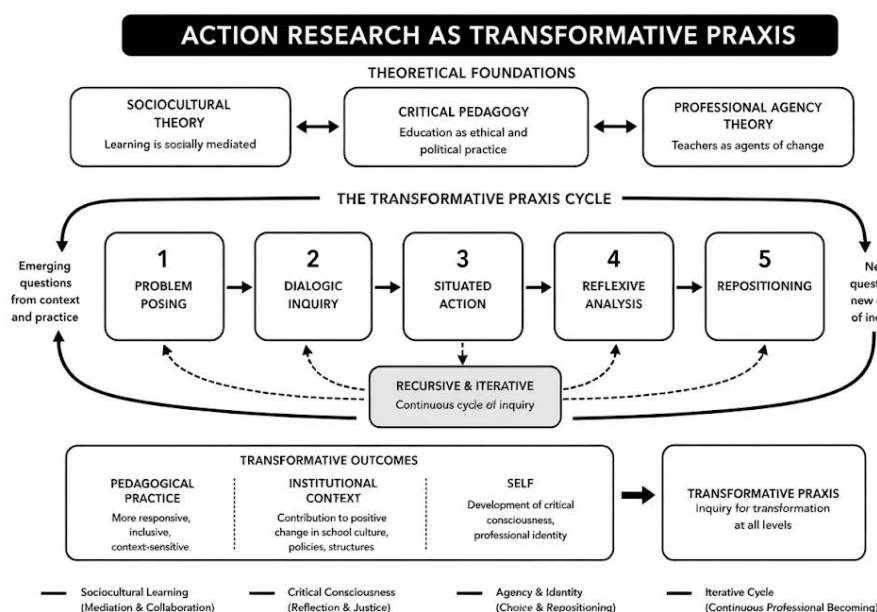
Because of these limitations, there is a need to reconceptualize AR in language teacher education as more than simply a method that solves immediate classroom problems. Accordingly, AR should help teachers study the assumptions, professional identities, institutional conditions, and social relations that constitute the foundation of their teaching, rather than content themselves with examining whether a particular intervention is appropriate. In this way, research becomes a sustainable professional practice that allows teachers to continuously question, understand and develop their skills, as suggested by Cochran-Smith & Lytle (2009). Seen in this light, AR may be regarded as a form of praxis, that is, the ongoing link between critical reflection and purposeful action, where reflection informs action and action, in turn, gives way to further reflection. According to Kemmis et al. (2014) this implies that teachers are not simply supposed to better their teaching practices within their immediate educational structures, but are also stimulated to critically question the assumptions, values, and power relations that constitute the foundations of those structures and attempt to transform them whenever necessary. As Kemmis et al. (2014) explained, “practice is not simply what people do; it is what people do in particular social, historical, and material conditions” (p. 17).

3. Action Research as Transformative Praxis: The Proposed Conceptual Framework

In an attempt to respond to the theoretical and methodological limitations mentioned above, the present section suggests to reconceptualize action research in language teacher education as transformative praxis. In this framework, AR is not simply introduced as a method that aims at improving classroom practices. It is rather understood as a process situated within a social context that allows teachers to scrutinize their teaching practices under a critical eye, interrogate the assumptions that underlie them, and attempt to transform both their own professional understanding and the conditions under which they operate.

The framework suggested herein considers teacher research as theoretically grounded, identity-informed, and ethically engaged. It is theoretically grounded because teachers rely on wider concepts of learning, interaction, power and professional growth to explain their experiences. It is identity-informed because research can affect the teachers’ understanding of their own identities, their professional roles, and their ability to take action. It is ethically engaged because teachers are incited to examine how their decisions impact their learners, colleagues and the broader educational environment. Three interrelated traditions constitute the theoretical underpinnings of this framework. They are sociocultural theory, critical pedagogy and professional agency theory. Together, these foundations highlight the complex nature of the interactions among knowledge, power, identity, and context in the professional development of language teachers.

Figure 1: Action research as Transformative Praxis: An Integrative Conceptual Framework for Action Research in Language Teacher Education



3.1 Sociocultural Theory: Action Research as Mediated Professional Learning

The sociocultural theory is rooted in the work of Vygotsky (1978) and it considers learning as a socially mediated process where language, cultural tools, interaction and the contexts in which individuals act affect their cognitive and professional development. When it is applied to language teacher education, this theory implies that learning to be a teacher cannot take place in isolation, but rather through interaction and engagement with learners, colleagues, institutional practices, and professional communities. In this regard, AR can operate as a mediational tool, which is a methodical kind of research by which teachers are helped to reflect on their practice, negotiate meaning, and construct new professional knowledge together by engaging in discussions and interaction (Johnson, 2009; Donato & McCormick, 1994). Through its iterative cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection, AR offers teachers ongoing chances to re-examine existing understandings and create better interpretations of teaching and learning.

When teachers act collaboratively, they make this process even more significant. Through dialogues with mentors, peers, or other practitioners, teachers can benefit from different forms of scaffolding that help them go beyond their current understandings, which highlights the Vygotskian principle of development within the **zone of proximal development (ZPD)**; that is, the distance between what a learner can accomplish independently and what they can achieve with guidance or collaboration (Vygotsky, 1978). He emphasised that “what children can do with the assistance of others might be in some sense more indicative of their mental development than what they can do alone” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 85). Therefore, according to the Sociocultural theory, AR is no more an individual reflective activity. It is rather reframed as a socially and culturally situated form of professional learning through which teacher cognition,

reflection, and pedagogical understanding can progressively develop (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Johnson & Golombek, 2016).

3.2 Critical Pedagogy: Action Research as Emancipatory Praxis

Different from the sociocultural theory which focuses on professional learning through interaction and collaboration, critical pedagogy is rather concerned with the ethical, political, and transformative aspects of education. Critical pedagogy, which was first proposed by Freire (1970), advocates the value of dialogue, critical reflection, and the collaborative construction of knowledge, and rejects to regard teaching as a neutral transfer of knowledge. It also invites both teachers and learners to critically examine how the social and institutional conditions affect the educational experience. Giroux (1988) corroborates this view by conceiving of teachers as transformative intellectuals. Rather than considering teachers as mere technicians who apply predetermined knowledge, Giroux conceives of them as professionals who interpret educational realities in a critical way and actively contribute to shaping more democratic and equitable practices. Action research, therefore, enables teachers to analyse the different powers that impact their profession and to use inquiry to transform their professional practices and the conditions that shape them.

Drawing on Kemmis (2009), AR can be considered as an emancipatory praxis which refers to the process by which critical reflection and purposeful action are integrated for the sake of challenging inequitable or restrictive educational conditions. Withing this perspective, AR is no more concerned merely with identifying classroom problems and proposing solutions to improve teaching practices, but rather with examining the assumptions, power relations, and institutional structures that influence language teaching and learning.

This new positioning of AR is most applicable to multilingual and postcolonial contexts characterised by linguistic hierarchies, curriculum ideologies, and dominant norms of language use that shape education. According to Freire (1970), teachers can rely on critical inquiry as a means to investigate these influences and promote greater critical consciousness (**conscientização**), which is defined as the ability to identify and critically explain social and educational inequities and work towards changing them. AR can, thus, constitute a strong support, not only to the improvement of pedagogical practices, but also to a more powerful commitment to equality, inclusion, and social justice in language education (Pennycook, 1994; Crookes, 2021).

3.3 Professional Agency: Identity Negotiated by Action Research

Professional agency theory is a third component of the framework. Teachers are, herein, regarded as active actors who are able to make their own choices, exercise judgement, and shape their teaching practices within the particular institutional and social conditions in which they operate. In this regard, agency is not an inherent or stable personal trait, but rather a dynamic ability that originates from teachers' experiences, professional identities available resources and the opportunities and constraints of their professional contexts (Eteläpelto et al., 2013; Priestley et al., 2015). Following this point of view, AR can offer a space for teachers to exercise and develop professional agency. When they are able to identify problems, collect evidence, reflect

on their practices, and make informed changes, teachers can develop greater voice and authority over professional decisions. Therefore, they become active participants in creating professional knowledge, rather than simply passive implementers of methods and curricula prescribed by external agents.

In addition, AR can play an important part in enabling teachers to develop and negotiate their identity as teachers because when they engage in systematic research, they are encouraged to rethink their beliefs, roles, values and understandings of themselves as educators. Language teacher identity is shaped and negotiated through teachers' experiences and the contexts in which they work. This is extremely important in the training of language teachers particularly because novice teachers may experience tensions between their prior beliefs, institutional expectations and the realities of their classroom practice and they need to reconcile all these (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Barkhuizen, 2017). When AR is viewed as an agentive process, it can encourage teachers not only to adjust their teaching practices but also to rethink their identity as teachers and the professional roles they can assume.

3.4. An Integrative Model—the Transformative Praxis Cycle

The framework proposed in the present paper is synthesised in what may be called the Transformative Praxis Cycle, which is constituted of three interrelated dimensions: critical reflection drawn from Freirean praxis, collaborative inquiry derived from sociocultural theory, and agentive action informed by professional agency theory. The proposed framework does not view AR as a fixed series of linear technical steps, but rather as a recursive and ongoing process where teachers continually analyse their experiences, question existing assumptions, take purposeful action, and reposition themselves within their specific professional contexts.

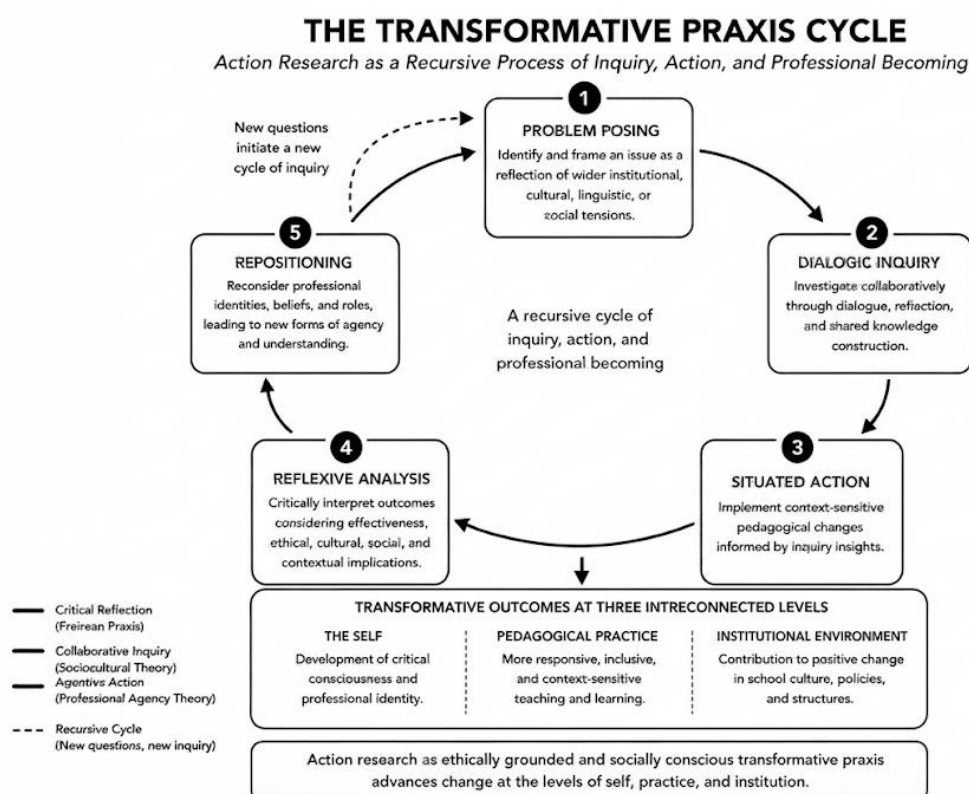
Thus, the *Transformative Praxis Cycle* transcends technical, linear models by anchoring practitioner inquiry within the specific linguistic, pedagogical, and socio-political realities of language teaching. To show its application in language teacher education, each of the five phases is put into practice through specific English Language Teaching (ELT) realities:

1. **Problem posing:** In this phase, teachers identify a problem and interpret it not simply as a specific classroom issue, but also as one that may reflect broader institutional, cultural, linguistic or social conditions. In ELT contexts, this entails conceptualising issues like student silence or resistance to rigid grammar-focused syllabi as reflections of linguistic hierarchies or restrictive institutional policies.
2. **Dialogic inquiry:** Teachers work together to analyse the problem by involving colleagues, mentors, students, or other relevant participants in discussions, reflection, and the collective construction of knowledge. In LTE, this phase utilizes dialogic tools (such as peer observations, and student feedback) to critically analyze language learning interactions and clarify language ideologies.
3. **Situated action:** On the basis of the inquiry findings, teachers introduce pedagogical changes that meet the specific requirements of their classrooms and educational institutions.

4. **Reflexive analysis:** Teachers engage in critical examination of the consequences of their actions by analysing not only the extent to which they are effective, but also how they impacted learner identity, communicative confidence, linguistic equity, and classroom power dynamics.
5. **Repositioning:** While the teachers are engaged in the inquiry process, they rethink their educational identities, beliefs, and roles and would eventually shift from passive implementers of textbooks and prescribed methods to independent knowledge producers and agentive language educators. This can possibly create new forms of agency and different manners of comprehending their position within the educational context and new questions regarding institutional practices, initiating subsequent cycles of inquiry.

Each cycle includes five interconnected phases:

Figure 2: Phases of The Transformative Praxis Cycle



This cycle is not fixed, but rather recursive. Indeed, repositioning may give way to new questions which in turn can lead to further inquiry. Action research, thus, turns into a form of transformative praxis that is both ethically grounded and socially conscious. Teachers can take part in this praxis at three interrelated levels: their personal identity, their pedagogical practice, and, whenever possible, the broader institutional context in which they operate.

4. Implications for Language Teacher Education

When grounded in critical reflection, identity, and agency, AR alters not only how teachers study classroom problems, but also how they see themselves as active, responsible agents of change. The following sections outline key areas where this approach can enhance teacher education. Thus, conceptualizing action research as transformative praxis has significant implications for LTE.

4.1 Curriculum Design: From Procedural Tasks to Inquiry-Based Learning

To render AR truly transformative in LTE, programs need to integrate continuous inquiry throughout the entire curriculum—from everyday coursework to student teaching and post-practicum experiences—rather than limiting it just to a single final project. Thus, curricula should provide future teachers with opportunities for collaborative spaces like seminars, group discussions and reflective journals to enable prospective teachers to question their assumptions and analyze language biases, multilingual teaching strategies, and classroom power structures together.

4.2. Teacher Identity Formation: Empowering the Reflective Practitioner

Developing a professional identity is especially challenging for novice language teachers in postcolonial settings like North Africa, where they feel caught between native-speaker standards, strict exam requirements and their students' real multilingual needs (Pennycook, 1998; Kumaravadivelu, 2012). Transformative AR offers these teachers a structured way to deal with these conflicting pressures. By using this approach, educators can counter native-speaker bias, gain confidence in their own teaching authority and this helps them trust their own experiences and make better decisions in the classroom.

4.3 Mentorship and Supervision: From Assessment to Facilitation

Within transformative AR, supervision shifts from hierarchical assessment into collaborative mentorship. Language teacher educators and supervisors must transcend the traditional role of evaluating procedural conformity with research steps. Instead, mentors act as dialogic partners who assist pre-service and in-service teachers in questioning linguistic assumptions, analyzing classroom interactional data, and addressing institutional constraints (Orland-Barak, 2001). As Freire (1970) argued, learning is not about an expert transmitting information to a beginner; instead, knowledge is built together through shared dialogue and reflection. To be able to do so, mentors themselves need to be properly trained for this shift.

4.4 Bridging the Research–Practice Divide: Teachers as Knowledge Producers

A long-standing problem in language teacher education is the academic research and actual classroom teaching divide. By showing that practitioner inquiry creates real knowledge, the transformative praxis model bridges the gap between university-based language research and real-world language teaching. To this effect, LTE programs must establish dissemination infrastructure—such as regional teacher-researcher networks, open-access practitioner journals

and conference panels—that reinforce language teachers' context-specific insights into broader academic and policy discourses (Burns & Edwards, 2014; Mockler & Sachs, 2011).

4.5 Equity and Contextual Responsiveness

Language teaching is inherently tied to questions of culture, power, and identity (Norton, 2000; Canagarajah, 1999). Transformative AR empowers language teachers to recognize local inequities, stop viewing multilingual students as lacking potential, and teach in ways that value their cultures and respond to their needs (Paris & Alim, 2017). In this way, AR links teaching inquiry with ethics and helps teachers identify local inequities and respond through fair, inclusive practices.

5. Epistemological Implications: Repositioning Knowledge, Research, and Authority

Reviewing AR in language teacher education as transformative praxis has epistemological implications that transcend pedagogy and curriculum. Indeed, it pushes asks us to rethink who gets to create knowledge, what counts as valid knowledge and who has the authority to speak about education. It breaks down the divide between university researchers and classroom teachers and challenges traditional hierarchies that favor academic university-based knowledge over teacher/ classroom-based experience. It recognizes classroom inquiry as a legitimate and valuable form of professional knowledge. This means that AR gives teachers a direct voice in detecting classroom issues, creating new insights and understanding school life. So, teachers gain authority by studying their own classrooms step-by-step instead of relying only on outside research. In this way, teachers become **critical professionals who** think actively, create knowledge and play key roles in improving education.

5.1 Decentring Academic Knowledge: Acknowledging Practitioner Epistemologies

Traditional research cultures usually put knowledge creation exclusively in the hands of university academics while teachers are expected to only use or implement research findings (Zeichner, 2010; Biesta, 2012). This division results in a real epistemological hierarchy where abstract academic theory is valued more than practical knowledge that teachers gain from their own classroom experience. A praxis-based AR rejects this hierarchy by considering teachers as true creators of knowledge, not just users of it. Instead of simply implementing university theories in the classroom, teachers obtain real pedagogical data by researching their own teaching. This aligns with Cochran-Smith and Lytle's (2009) notion of "inquiry as stance" where teachers always question, interpret and build knowledge rather than merely accept it. This practical teacher knowledge is closely related to what philosophers call *phronesis*, or practical wisdom; that is, the ability to make context-aware, ethical choices in complex classroom situations (Kessels & Korthagen, 1996; Kemmis et al., 2014). Instead of solely relying on universal rules, practical knowledge responds to the specific needs, students, and environment of a particular school which makes this approach suitable for language teaching, where diversity and change are constant.

5.2 Democratizing Research: From Positivist Authority to Dialogic Inquiry

Traditional educational research is frequently contested for being too far from real experiences of teachers and learners: knowledge is usually created by outside academics and then passed to teachers to use it (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Kincheloe, 2003). Transformative AR shifts this by making research a collaborative, dialogic process where the people actually involved in education (teachers and learners) help create and interpret that knowledge. This vision aligns directly with Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR), which aims to make research more democratic by involving participants in every step - identifying problems, examining their own settings, analyzing evidence and applying meaningful changes (Kemmis et al., 2014). In a CPAR model, questions of voice and power are paramount: researchers must ask such critical questions as whose voices are actually heard? Whose knowledge is valued? And who truly benefits from the research?

In language teacher education, this implies building research teams where everyone—university experts, teacher trainers, mentors, active teachers and even learners—works together as equals, rather than split into fixed roles of "experts" and "test subjects." By identifying problems, reflecting and constructing solutions together, these partnerships generate realistic research which is grounded in actual classroom realities and which supports everyone's professional growth (Lytle, 2008; Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2014). Therefore, democratizing research does not mean ignoring academic expertise. Instead, it creates a two-way exchange between academic theories and classroom experience who learn from and challenge each other.

5.3 Bridging the Research–Practice Gap: Praxis as Knowledge Integration

The research and practice divide is a longstanding issue in teacher education. Professional knowledge is not just a matter of applying abstract theories made outside the classroom. As Schön (1983) puts it, real professional understanding grows also from taking action and reflecting on real experience in the classroom. A praxis-oriented conception of AR bridges this gap by connecting theory and practice. Teachers use theory to understand classroom problems, test out solutions and then reflect on those results to improve their teaching and understanding. Instead of just applying outside research, teachers generate knowledge directly from their own practices and become active creators of knowledge rather than passive users (Sachs, 2016). This view expands what we count as valuable professional knowledge. Instruments like reflective journals, practitioner narratives, case studies and dialogic accounts can document facets of teaching that standardized measurements may miss (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Valuing these methods supports a more inclusive view of inquiry in LTE—one where systematic evidence and real classroom experience work together.

5.4 Contesting the Politics of Evidence and Accountability

Educational research is heavily influenced by test scores, metrics and data-driven policies. When schools focus too much on measurable targets, teaching can be reduced to a simple list of skills instead of a complex, ethical profession (Ball, 2003; Biesta, 2009). In this kind of environments, AR may just become a means of compliance checking, rather than encouraging true, critical reflection. A transformative praxis approach alters how we view AR by placing ethical choices, educational purpose and teacher responsibility at the center. This aligns with

Biesta's (2009) claim that education should not simply ask "what works?" but also what is actually good for students and who benefits from it. In LTE, this entails that research should not just seek for measurable outcomes; it must also consider equity, meaning, context and educational justification in teaching methods. Through this lens, AR provides teachers with an instrument to critically question accountability demands instead of just responding to them. It gives teachers room to use their judgment, think about ethics and talk about what matters in education which helps them resist rigid standards and top-down control (Smyth, 1992; Sachs, 2016). So, AR is not only about improving instruction; it also protects the reflective, ethical and democratic spirit of the teaching profession.

5.5 Recovering Professionalism and Teacher Agency

Within a transformative model of AR, teacher agency is the core of professional growth. In modern views, agency is not seen as mere personal freedom, but as a teacher's ability to take meaningful action within—and sometimes even against—school, cultural, and political pressures (Eteläpelto et al., 2013; Priestley et al., 2015). AR boosts teacher agency by allowing educators detect problems, challenge assumptions, create local knowledge and make informed choices. In fact, teachers can actively critique and shape their working conditions and not simply adapt to them. This aligns with Sachs's (2001) idea of the "activist professional," where being professional goes beyond being competent and responsible; it also involves being critically aware, working collaboratively, acting ethically and actively participating in educational change. AR thus promotes a broader conception of professionalism: one that regards teachers as reflective practitioners, creators of knowledge, and active leaders in molding classroom and school practices.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to reconceptualize AR in LTE as *transformative praxis*. The suggested model transcends the predominantly instrumental or technocratic interpretations to present AR as a process that combines critical reflection, professional learning, identity growth, agency, and attention to the broader social and institutional conditions of language education. Integrating sociocultural theory, critical pedagogy, and professional agency theory, the paper positions AR as a critical dimension in language teachers' empowerment across several interrelated aspects. Sociocultural theory stresses the significance of mediated and collaborative professional learning; critical pedagogy raises questions of power, inequality, ethics, and critical consciousness into teacher inquiry; and professional agency theory demonstrates how teachers can nurture the ability to make purposeful decisions, negotiate their identities, and impact their working environments. All these perspectives construct the theoretical background for the proposed *Transformative Praxis Cycle*, in which problem posing, dialogic inquiry, situated action, reflexive analysis, and professional repositioning act as iterative and interrelated processes. The proposed framework also carries broader implications for LTE. It suggests that AR should not be one-time project but rather embedded throughout teacher preparation. Furthermore, it calls for more dialogic and facilitative mentorship, greater recognition of practitioner knowledge, stronger links between research and classroom practice, and increased attention to contextual responsiveness, equity, and professional judgment.

However, the proposed framework is still conceptual and needs empirical examination and validation. Future research should explore how praxis-oriented AR impacts teacher learning, identity development, agency, and classroom practice across different educational and cultural settings. Particular attention can be paid to the institutional factors that help or hinder practitioner inquiry such as curriculum requirements, assessment systems, leadership practices and teacher-education policies. It is also necessary to explore how this framework can work in multilingual, multicultural and postcolonial settings. In these contexts, language education is often affected by distinctive linguistic hierarchies, cultural histories, and institutional realities (Canagarajah, 1999; Kumaravadivelu, 2012). Longitudinal studies would be especially helpful to see if ongoing involvement in AR leads to longer-term changes in professional agency, autonomy, identity, and pedagogical practice (Priestley et al., 2015).

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